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ABSTRACT

This report discusses several studies of Running Start, a dual-enrollment program for high school juniors and seniors in Washington. The program was created in 1990 by the Washington State Legislature to expand educational choices for high school students. In 1991-1992, there were less than 1,000 students participating; in 1998-1999 there were more than 12,500 students. Thirty-two community and technical colleges and three universities participate in the program. Highlights of this report include: (1) A statewide study indicated that 73% of students enroll in the program to earn college credits, 64% to save costs of taking college courses, 60% to "take responsibility" for their own education, and 58% to be in class fewer hours during the day; (2) At the University of Washington (UW), Running Start students tended to have somewhat higher high school GPAs point averages and SAT scores than freshmen as a whole; (3) At UW, 54% of Running Start students were white, 26% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and nearly 2% African American--a diversity similar to the entire freshmen class; (4) Statewide, Running Start students enroll in social sciences (24%), English and speech (21%), humanities (18%), math (11%), and science (8%); and (5) Better communication between community college advising and university advising and between high school counselors and community college advisors is needed. (NB)

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Running Start Research and Discussion
October 2000 PNAIRP Meeting

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Introduction

This presentation summarizes information discussed at the Running Start Symposium and other sessions that were held at the Eleventh Annual Higher Education Conference in Vancouver, Washington, in May 2000. As the facilitator of that symposium, it was my pleasure and privilege to work with Ron Crossland, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Flash Gibson and Anne Schwartz, Eastern Washington State University; Peggy Goldberg, Centralia College; Maren Halvorsen and Nancy Robinson, University of Washington; Kathy Lundeen, South Puget Sound Community College; and John Swiney, University of Washington. I'd also like to acknowledge Damian Jordan who presented research on Running Start students at Western Washington University at the Washington Assessment Conference at another session.

Some caveats: 1) For the purposes of this presentation I have condensed much of the research, particularly methodology. For those of you interested in methods, it is probably best to consult the primary sources, which are listed in the reference section, along with some related web sites. 2) Running Start students are as diverse as any other cross-section of students. Some are academically gifted; some are seeking an alternative to the high school environment. Some have completed 90 college credits and/or an AA degree through Running Start, while others have earned less than 15 credits. When referring to "Running Start students" and "Running Start programs," please keep in mind that there are differences among students and Running Start programs at the various community colleges and four-year colleges participating in the Running Start program. 3) I will be referring mostly to research that has been conducted at the University of Washington, The Evergreen State College and Western Washington University. This research might best be regarded as "post-Running Start" research, that is, what happens to students after their participation in Running Start. 4) Finally, a good deal of the views expressed are those of Running Start students, rather than faculty, administrators, or advisors.

The Running Start Program was created in 1990 by the Washington State Legislature to expand educational choices for high school students. It has grown in student enrollment from less than one thousand students in 1991-92 to over 12,500 students in 1998-99, and is expected to continue growing. Currently, 32 community and technical colleges, as well as three public universities participate directly in the program. Running Start student receives dual credit at their high school and at the college level. The state pays for tuition and college fees; students are responsible for books, transportation, and other school-related needs.

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The average Running Start student is enrolled in 8-9 college credits per quarter, with other classes taken in high school. For a Running Start student to earn 90 credits in two years, he or she would need to be enrolled in 15 credits per quarter, or 45 credits during an academic year. Although most Running Start students are not using the program to complete their first two years of college, it is possible to do so, and some Running Start students enter the 4-year college

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system as both "freshmen," that is, newly graduated high school students along with their non-Running Start peers, and "juniors," in terms of earned college credits and exposure to the college environment. In some cases, they have completed their general education requirements.

Is this a positive, negative, or simply different outcome? The answer may depend on whose opinion you ask, students, colleges that participate in the Running Start program, high schools where Running Start students are enrolled, the 4-year colleges into which Running Start students "transfer," and so on. There is starting to be a body of evidence collected primarily by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (e.g., Crossland, May 2000) and the University of Washington (e.g., Swiney, May 2000), that indicates positive outcomes for the Running Start students who have been tracked through 4-year college graduation, or at least, being in Running Start did no harm. In many cases, Running Start students are indistinguishable from their non-Running Start peers in terms of indicators such as retention, college grade point average, time to degree, and graduation rate.

General Information on High School Students in the Running Start Program

Ron Crossland, Associate Director of State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, in cooperation with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Higher Education Coordinating Board conducted a major research study on the Running Start Program (Crossland, May 2000). His research supports the Running Start program but recognizes the need for additional staff because of increased demand for counseling and advising at both high schools and colleges. State support follows the student, with the high school retaining 7% for each student. This transfer of funding has policy implications for both high schools and the participating college.

What is the policy for admission to Running Start?

Each community or four-year college participating in the Running Start Program uses the same admissions standards as they do for their other students into college-level programs. Typically, these include ASSET placement scores or other similar test above a requisite score, high school GPA, and junior-level standing in high school. College credits earned through Running Start transfer to at all public and most private Washington state universities and colleges. Students are responsible to apply for admission and follow through if accepted.

Why do students enroll in Running Start? In this statewide study, the most important reasons students gave for enrolling in Running Start were the following:

73% earn college credits
64% save costs of taking college courses
60% to be responsible for my own education

Somewhat important reasons included:

83% to take courses not available in high school
77% to get started on career training
58% to be in class fewer hours a day

What types of courses do Running Start students enroll in? The top five subject areas by FTE enrollment are the following:

24% Social Science
21% English and speech
18% Humanities
11% Math
8% Science

Former Running Start Students at the University of Washington

John Swiney at the University of Washington, has been tracking the performance of Running Start students who later enroll at the UW since 1993 (Swiney, May 2000). The number of students at the UW who had been in Running Start has increased from 89 students in Fall 1993 to 511 in Fall 1999. The average number of transfer credits has increased from 25 in 1993 to 41 in 1999.

Fall 1999 Preliminary Data. Of the 511 former Running Start Entering Students who entered the UW in Fall 1999, most (82%) entered as freshmen, 9% entered as sophomores, and 9% entered as juniors. About half were men (49.9%) and half women (50.1%). The ethnic diversity of Running Start students was similar to the entering freshmen class:

Fall 1999	UW Running Start (N=511)	All UW Freshmen (N=4353)
African American	1.6%	1.9%
Native American	1.4%	.9%
Asian American	256%	25.2%
Hispanic/Latino	3.3%	2.8%
Caucasian/White	54.2%	53.6%
Other	13.9%	14.3%
HS GPA	3.69	3.63
Combined SAT Score	1200	1160
Spring 1999 UW GPA*	3.06	3.01
Spring 1999 credits*	14.5	13.8

* previous year cohort

Running Start students tend to have somewhat higher high school GPAs and SAT scores than freshmen as a whole. For example, in Fall 1999, average high school GPA was 3.69 for Running Start students compared with 3.63 for all freshmen; average combined SAT scores for Running Start students was just under 1200, compared with 1160 for all entering freshmen. Such differences are not great in magnitude, but have been consistent over time. Similarly, Running Start students tend to earn higher UW grades and more credits their first year, but the difference is small: Spring 1999 UW GPA was 3.06 for Running Start, compared with 3.01 for all students; average number of credits earned was 14.5 compared with 13.8.

The 1993 cohort of Running Start students showed a 64% 6-year graduation rate, which was somewhat lower than the graduation rate for the 1993 freshmen cohort, which was 72%. However, the 5-year graduation rate for the 1994 Running Start cohort was 65%, just higher than the 1994 freshmen cohort 5-year graduation rate which was 64%.

Former Running Start Students at The Evergreen State College

In the Summer of 1999, I conducted a study based on student records, of two cohorts of former Running Start Students, those who entered Evergreen in Fall 1997, and those who entered in Fall 1998 (Meld, September 1999). The college first started coding students who had been in Running Start in Fall 1997. The purpose of the student was to determine which scenario best matched these students: Were they generally the same as other Evergreen students, except that they had earned some prior college credits? Were they accelerated in their academic pathways, planning to take more advanced course right away and graduate sooner than their non-Running Start peers? Or were they at risk academically, more likely to drop out or earn fewer credits?

For this presentation I will concentrate on the Fall 1998 cohort of 37 Running Start students, although there were some differences between the two cohorts. Of the Fall 1998 Running Start cohort, 26 were women and 11 were men. Most (74%) entered as freshmen, the other 25% entered with a sophomore level of credits. The ethnic breakdown of the Running Start students is shown below, but since the numbers of Running Start students is small, comparisons of percentages should be interpreted with caution:

Fall 1998	TESC Running Start (N=37)	All TESC Freshmen (N=480)
African American	2.7%	1.5%
Native American	0%	3.3%
Asian American	5.4%	2.7%
Hispanic/Latino	2.7%	2.9%
Caucasian/White	89.2%	89.6%
HS GPA	3.33	3.10
SAT Verbal	580	587
SAT Math	529	534
Spring 1999 credits	43.6	43.5

Overall, Running Start students were similar to other entering freshmen in terms of high school grade point average and SAT scores. The average number of credits Running Start students transferred in was 30, the equivalent of two quarters of full-time academic work. Most Running Start students enrolled in Core or All-Level programs, interdisciplinary learning communities designed for freshmen or a mixed level of undergraduates, as did other entering freshmen.

The Fall 1998 to Spring 1999 retention rate of Running Start students was the same as other freshmen, 81%. They earned an average of 43.6 credits their first year at Evergreen, just higher than the overall average of 43.5 credits. Running Start students were also similar to other freshmen, with a ratio of credits earned to registered of 93%. (Students at the college receive evaluations rather than grades, so this ratio is used as an indicator of performance.)

In conclusion, Running Start students at Evergreen appear to be doing well and appear to be following the same enrollment patterns at other freshmen.

University of Washington Study of the Social Adjustment of Running Start Students

In the Fall of 1998, Maren Halvorsen, Kathleen Noble, Nancy Robinson, and Nancy Sisko at the Hal Robinson Center for the Study of Capable Youth began a study of Running Start students in Washington State to see how these students were making the transition from high school to college in terms of both academic and social preparation (Halvorsen, Noble, Robinson, and Sisko, 1999-2000). Clearly, there are differences in expectations about student roles and responsibilities in the high school and college setting. College work demands greater individual responsibility and maturity, as well as knowledge and skills in subject matter.

The researchers asked a number of key questions about Running Start Students: Did they feel part of their surroundings? Did they have access to individual attention and assistance? Did they receive appropriate and encouraging advising? Or did the Running Start students fall in between the cracks, and feel detached from both high school and college? If they felt alienated in high school, did their situation get better or worse as participants in the Running Start program?

The UW study surveyed Running Start students at four community college sites (Tacoma Community College, Centralia College, Yakima Valley College, and Eastern Washington University), as well as former Running Start students currently enrolled at the University of Washington. The questionnaires focused on these issues:

1. Did the students feel prepared for college-level work and environment?
2. Did they feel connected to their high school or college?
3. Was the advice from high school and college advisors helpful?
4. What was their general level of satisfaction with the Running Start program?

The return rate for the survey was 40%, 654 responses out of a targeted population of 1650. Students completed a section on general demographic information, a section on their experience at the community college that consisted of a four-point agree-disagree scale, and two open-ended questions on what would improve the Running Start program and any other information about Running Start they would like to add. Some sample questions:

> (Agree/disgree) Running Start is a more positive social experience for me than high school.
>
> (Agree/disagree) When I began Running Start, I was well prepared academically for the classes I took."
>
> How many of your community college instructors do you feel are approachable and helpful to you?

The first thing researchers noted in their results was the lack of ethnic diversity among Running Start students from the participating community colleges. For example, "at Tacoma Community College, only 2% of the Running Start respondents were African-American, 5.9% were Asian-

American, and 80.4% were Caucasian." There were no African-American Running Start respondents at either Centralia or Eastern Washington University, and only 1% of the former Running Start students at the UW were African American, although 21% were Asian-American. The diversity profile for Running Start students who later enrolled at the UW did not differ much from the ethnic divisions within the overall UW population. Yakima Valley had the highest percentage of Hispanic Running Start students, 14%, but otherwise little ethnic diversity in the Running Start program.

"What does this tell us? Most probably that Running Start does not draw new populations to the University of Washington, but rather brings to the UW students who would probably have come anyway." The lack of minority participation in Running Start may be a cause for concern, since Running Start could be an inexpensive way to get a head start in college for first-generation students and students of color who often come from low-income homes. Perhaps we pay more attention as to why these students are not enrolling in Running Start in greater numbers.

The Running Start students in this study tended to be ambitious in terms of their aspirations not only to complete baccalaureate but also to obtain graduate degrees and other types of professional education. Only a small percentage planned to stop with an AA degree. Because most Running Start students view college as a means to go on to graduate and professional studies, the issue of transfer credits and advising is critical. "It is important for advisors to take student goals into account when discussing their programs with them, and to consider that many of these students plan to go into four-year colleges after community college (p. 8)."

Along these lines, the UW students in the study who had been in Running Start most frequently mentioned that there was a need for more advice regarding transfer credits. "Looking back upon their community college careers, they complained of credits that didn't transfer, and lack of knowledge about the UW on the part of the community college advisors (p. 8)." Almost half of the UW students who had been in Running Start planned to earn a Master's degree, 19% planned on earning a doctoral degree, and 11% planned on attending law or medical school.

Although the study did not obtain the perceptions of the faculty who had Running Start students in their classes, due to the confidential nature of the program, the researchers found the comfort level of the Running Start students with their academic work "striking." There were no significant differences among the four community colleges in terms of respondents' view of their academic preparation. The responses of the UW students who had been in the Running Start program were also similar. "A remarkable 90% either agreed or strongly agreed...that they felt academically prepared for the classes they took at the community college level (p.12)."

However, later on in the survey, when asked the one improvement they would make in the Running Start program, some students responded that their high school and/or college could have done a better job of preparing them for the rigors of college work. Some mentioned they had never developed adequate study skills.

It is interesting to note that while the vast majority of Running Start students in this study felt well-prepared for college work, many felt that there were <u>other</u> Running Start students who were immature and lacked academic preparation. Their solution was to raise the standards so that a 3.5 GPA would be required of Running Start applicants. Behavior was more of an issue than

academic ability, as one student responded: "I would make the acceptance process harder to eliminate some of the trouble makers." Overall, the students felt accepted by faculty, as well as the non-Running Start students. They felt accepted by the other students and seemed to blend in with community college population.

Several students wrote that the Running Start experience provided them with a learning environment that was far different from high school, and in terms of the new responsibilities and independence that college requires:

> "I was unhappy in high school and found what I was looking for in this program. In high school, I felt like I was sitting in a daycare. I like the independence that Running Start gives me." Another: "I am very glad to have had this experience, I feel like I am treated as an adult in community college...I feel more responsible for my education...People of all races and lifestyles have been part of my learning experience which has also enriched my life (p. 18)."

The researchers found that many of these students expressed anger and frustration with their high school. Thus, other benefits of the program included far less peer pressure, pressure to fit in, harassment, and relief from busy work, lack of discipline, lack of challenge, too much emphasis on sports, not enough on learning. In several respects students reported that the social experience of Running Start social experience was as important as the academic experience. Some of the students expressed the feeling that they found friends of like minds for the first time:

> "I hated my high school environment. No one really cared about learning; sports were the main focus. When I came to college I felt like I was in a whole new world. Nobody has ever harassed me (which is typical in high school) and I've made a lot of friends (p. 20)."

Although there were differences among the community colleges in the study, an important area where student satisfaction was low was with their community college advisor. Similarly, the UW respondents reported that their community college advisors had not done an adequate job in regard to transfer credits. There was interest in better communication between advisors at the community college and the university level, so that the advisors could provide better information to students. One of the bright spots according to the students was the Running Start counselor.

The study also addressed advising provided by the high school. One student wrote that high schools should be more supportive of Running Start and encourage students to participate. Some students saw the high school counselor as actively opposed to Running Start, not helpful or supportive, or simply not well informed. There was a feeling that the high school counselors made it difficult for then to participate in high school activities and stay connected to their high school. Better communication between Running Start and high school counselors was urged. A frequent response about how to improve the program was, "I would have liked my high school counselor be more informative and supportive of Running Start."

To be fair, the researchers noted that the student perspective might reflect their own concerns and problems rather than provide an objective picture of the high school counselors and their role in

the program. On the whole, the students in this study were very satisfied with Running Start, their preparation for Running Start and their academic progress. According to the researchers:

> We came into this study with the intention of discovering any problems in the transition of these students from high school to college. What we found were indeed some problems with transition, but also that the vast majority of students are in fact more than ready for the move from high school. It is remarkable to see the indictment of high school education in the responses of the students. For them, community college provided just the kind of learning environment that they had been craving (p. 28).

However, there is room for improvement. There is a lack of ethnic diversity among the students participating in Running Start, perhaps due to the cost of books and transportation. Many students expressed their concerns about other students and lack of preparation and immaturity. This might be addressed by higher admission standards into the program or better student orientation about the expectations of college-level work.

Are these students falling between the cracks, socially? Most Running Start students did not report much involvement in college activities; however, it appears that the students themselves may prefer things this way. The conventional high school may feel "claustrophobic and damaging...their lack of interest in activities may be one reason why they were so eager to leave high school (p. 29)." They do seem to value their independence and new friendships.

Overall, the researchers found that the positive aspects of Running Start outweighed the negatives. One area where more connection is clearly needed is advising, especially in regard to transfer credits. The researchers recommended better communication between community college advising and university advising, and also between high school counselors and community college advisors. The need for consistent and accurate information is paramount.

Former Running Start Students at Western Washington University

Running Start students at Western have increased in number from 59 in 1994 to 248 in 1998. As a unique group, they are not quite the same as students who start at Western as first-time, entering freshmen, but neither are they like traditional transfer students. Although usually the same age as other freshmen, students who have been in Running Start can enter Western with as many credits as transfer students with AA degrees. While most students their age are completing lower-division general education requirements, some Running Start students may enroll immediately in upper-division courses, and starting to complete requirements for their majors.

Similarly, Running Start students fall in between traditional native and traditional transfer students in terms of degree completion patterns. The number of credits transferred by Running Start students varies widely. Generally, they have earned far more previous college credits than traditional freshmen, but far fewer than regular transfers, who usually enter with an AA degree and/or at least 90 credits.

Compared to the approximate figures for Western graduates overall, students who were in Running Start about as likely to earn a BA degree (69% overall), more likely to earn a BS degree

(17% overall), and less likely to earn a BAE degree (13% overall). This group of 71 students took an average 3.6 years to graduate, which is less than the averages for traditional natives, who may take four or five years to graduate, but more than transfers, who usually take two or three years. (For more information, see McKinney, Frye, and Trimble, 1999).

The research team of Damian Jordan, Gary McKinney, and Joseph Tremble used focus groups to capture the experience of former Running Start students who were registered in Spring 1997 at WSU (Jordan, McKinney, and Trimble, January 2000). Five focus group sessions produced responses from 30 Running Start participants. These students included 25 women and 5 men, ranging in age from 18-23 years in age. The number of Running Start credits they had earned ranged from 12 to 90, with 17 having 90 previously earned credits when they entered as "freshmen." Their motivation to participate in Running Start included lack of academic challenge at their high school, or general dissatisfaction with high school. At the time of this study, they had earned between 106 and 215 credits.

The Western Washington University study started with the premise that Running Start students, who have spent at much as two years of their education prior to Western attending community college full-time, are developmentally different from other freshmen students who has spent that time with their age peers in high school. Running Start students, especially if they have earned an AA degree, arrive at WSU with a different educational and social background from other freshmen. Do the programs and services that are designed for traditional freshmen work for students who have been in Running Start?

Analysis of the focus group transcripts produced five recurrent themes: students' advising and registration experience; preparation for academic work and social experience at Western; fitting in at Western; response to having been in Running Start; and advice for Western. Most of the students had been through an orientation, but found the advising to be lacking. Students reported inadequate advising regarding transfer college credits and regarding their intended major. Some reported that no one in registration or admissions knew anything about Running Start; the information they needed was lacking.

The students reported being well-prepared, eager to tackle another college system, and confident due to prior experience in navigating the community college system. For some, the community college was not challenging enough, and did not provide adequate preparation, but others found it a good bridge to the four-year college. There were complaints that it was taking longer to complete their degrees than expected because of poor advising and having some credits that did not transfer.

While some of the students were apprehensive about fitting in with older students in upper-division courses, most of the students reported that their experience with age diversity at the community college was good preparation to be in upper-division classes. However, the most frequent complaint was about being assigned to the freshmen dorm, which did not provide an appropriate study environment. There were too many parties; the other freshmen acted like the very students in high school they had wanted to get away from by enrolling in Running Start.

Where did the former Running Start students see themselves fitting in?

> The question of whether they themselves were freshmen or juniors or something else was itself an issue for most of those participants who had high numbers of transfer credits. They did not share classes with freshmen, although this was their age-peer group, and "freshmen" was what they heard the University call them...."I already had an associate's degree and this piece of paper saying I had completed two years of college, and I considered myself a junior...but I was really confused as to where exactly I was. No one knew where to place me, and I wasn't sure if I was a freshmen or a junior (p. 7)."

This difficulty was less intense for Running Start students who had not gone to community college full-time and stayed in touch with their high school peers. For example, one student had remained in her high school half-time, and had no problem seeing herself as a freshmen. All students were positive in their attitudes about the educational and personal benefits of Running Start and would recommend the program to others.

> "Running Start made me feel like I'd gotten ahead and really done something positive." "Running Start is a real advantage as far as everything I got to learn, all the different people I met... I feel like I am a lot more mature because of it...Anyone who can do it, should (p. 7)."

Students in the focus group offered the following advice to Western: that there be designated Running Start advisors, or that former Running Start students be peer advisors to entering students who had been in Running Start during summer orientation.

Students also felt that there was too much pigeonholing of students. In particular, other students, faculty, and advisors were too concerned about "What year are you?" It seemed to be the first question anyone asked. "We shouldn't be like, oddballs, the thing that messes everybody's schedule up because we're not freshmen and we're not transfers." Running Start students did not want to be regarded as oddities but rather as a legitimate and accepted part of the student body.

Most students in this study reported satisfaction with the quality of their experience at Western Washington University, especially the college faculty. They also appreciated staff and the "extra mile" taken to provide help when needed. They expressed appreciation for the quality of student life and availability of extra-curricular activities, even if they chose not to become involved.

Western is currently exploring ways to enable the orientation and advising process to better serve the needs of Running Start students. The "traditional freshmen" as a norm may be replaced by a growing awareness of the diversity of entering students. " The time is approaching when the "traditional freshmen" may become more notational than real. The arrival of Running Start students and their equivalents in other states...should be seen as adding just another facet of diversity to an ever-changing student body (p. 8)."

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Running Start Symposium, at the Eleventh Annual Higher Education Assessment Conference (May 2000). Speakers:

Ron Crossland, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Flash Gibson, Eastern Washington State University
Peggy Goldberg, Centralia College
Maren Halvorsen, University of Washington
Kathy Lundeen, South Puget Sound Community College
Andrea Meld, The Evergreen State College (Session facilitator)
Nancy Robinson, University of Washington
Anne Schwartz, A., Eastern Washington State University
John Swiney, University of Washington

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